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AUTHOR Cronin, Michael W.; Grice, George L.
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ABSTRACT

The Oral Communication Across the Curriculum (OCXC) program is a university-wide program using oral communication activities to enhance learning of course content and to improve oral communication skills of participating students. Implementing OCXC programs in postsecondary institutions involves planning, publicizing, gearing up, conducting, spreading the "pedagospel," and securing additional sources of funding. Planning requires consideration of such issues as the objectives of the program, personnel needs, equipment and facility needs, training requirements for participating students and faculty, support services, quality control and assessment procedures, operational policies, publicity and public relations requirements, dissemination, and rewards for participants. The potential of OCXC in improving teaching/learning should be accepted and endorsed throughout the university, and the program must be developed university-wide. The main element in any OCXC program is the design, implementation, and evaluation of oral communication activities in non-speech courses across the curriculum, and assessing program outcomes. The benefits of the program could be disseminated through conferences, workshops, publications, and periodic reports. A successful program will require additional support as demand grows, and support may be explored through various ways including budget initiatives, grants, and commercial links. (15 references) (LPT)

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Implementing Oral Communication Across the Curriculum

Michael W. Cronin
Director, Oral Communication Program
Radford University

George L. Grice
Coordinator, Oral Communication Program
Radford University

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Implementing Oral Communication Across the Curriculum

Abstract

Approximately 20 post-secondary institutions have established campus-wide programs of oral communication across the curriculum. This paper describes the major elements involved in implementing such programs.

The contemporary language across the curriculum movement began with "British educators' emphasis on teaching language through 'talk' in the sixties" (Russell, 1988). However, selected American institutions of higher education have explored various applications of cross-curricular language instruction over the past century.

> When reference is made to "communication across the curriculum," it is evident that the reference is to a variety of approaches rather than to a single entity. It could be integration into a single discipline such as English or a single course such as business communication. It could mean the formation of a speaking lab to assist students in preparing communication related assignment[sic]. It could mean the interest of an individual faculty member with a desire to use communication activities, or it could mean a well-define [sic] curriculum-wide program. Whatever the approach, communication educators need to attend to several variables to assure that students are indeed receiving a worthwhile experience. Through attention to training, quality, breadth and sequencing, these approaches can help students begin to develop much needed communication abilities. (Hay, 1988, p. 13)

In addition to providing training in developing oral communication skills in a variety of contexts, many oral communication across the curriculum (OCXC) programs emphasize the use of oral communication activities to enhance learning of course

content.

> Speaking across the curriculum emphasizes the need for talk in the classroom. There should be ungraded talk, appraised talk, and graded talk. If oral communication functions to help students learn, then these programs highlight the epistemological functions of language; recognizing that language shapes knowledge. (Palmerton, 1988, p.12)

This paper describes the primary considerations involved in implementing a program of OCXC in post-secondary institutions. For purposes of this paper, OCXC is defined as a university-wide program using oral communication activities to (a) enhance learning of course content and (b) improve oral communication skills of participating students. Implementation considerations include: planning, publicizing, gearing up, conducting, spreading the pedagospel, and securing additional sources of funding (see Cronin & Glenn, 1990b; Cronin & Grice, 1990, 1991; Roberts, 1984; Weiss, 1988, 1990 for more detailed descriptions of selected implementation procedures).

Planning OCXC

Development of a successful OCXC program requires extensive planning. It is imperative that all parties involved in conducting such programs consider issues such as the objectives, personnel needs, equipment and facility needs, training requirements for participating students and faculty, support services, implementation procedures, quality control and assessment

procedures, publicity and public relations requirements, dissemination, rewards for participants, operational policies, and short-term and long-term planning. The potential of OCXC in improving teaching/learning should be accepted and endorsed throughout the university, and the program must be developed as a university-wide program. Faculty, administrators, and students throughout the university must be involved and must interact in planning issues of mutual concern. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address each planning issue, but several important questions particularly relevant to each constituency are identified below.

Administrators

Do they realize what an OCXC program requires and can they provide adequate support for the program? Do they intend to use OCXC to meet accreditation requirements and, if so, what role do speech courses play in accreditation strategies? Are they committed to promoting OCXC throughout the university and devising appropriate rewards for participating faculty? Do they really support efforts to improve teaching/learning and, if so, what is the priority of OCXC activities on standards for faculty evaluation?

Non-Speech Faculty Throughout the University

Are they committed to using oral communication to enhance learning of course content? Do they recognize that they can and should play a role in enhancing the oral communication skills of students in their courses? Are they interested in exploring ways

to improve the teaching/learning process even if it requires modification of their teaching techniques and reduced coverage of course content? Are they willing to attend training sessions to learn oral communication skills and applications appropriate to their courses? How will they evaluate students' oral communication activities in their courses?

Speech Communication Faculty

Do they accept the pedagogical value of OCXC? Are they willing and able to provide training to non-speech faculty (and perhaps students) in the design, implementation, and evaluation of OCXC? Do they perceive OCXC as a threat to continued (or expanded) support of speech courses at the university? Do they recognize potential benefits such as increased research opportunities, improved cross-disciplinary instruction, and enhanced departmental credibility from their participation in OCXC?

Students

Are they interested in improving their oral communication skills? Are they interested in promoting more active learning techniques throughout the university? What reservations do they have about the inclusion of additional oral communication activities in non-speech courses (e.g., communication apprehension)?

Publicizing OCXC

To be successful an OCXC program must actively involve the four audiences targeted in the planning stage: administrators, university-wide faculty, speech communication faculty, and

students. Initially, a high-visibility publicity strategy is essential to announce the program, explain its objectives, generate interest, and secure participation. It is also important that publicity be on-going to maintain interest and involve new faculty. The best informational strategy combines printed publicity, group meetings, and one-on-one interaction. Publicity outlets available to OCXC programs include:

1. A fact sheet describing the program and its services.

2. Open houses familiarizing interested faculty, administrators, and students with the services, facilities, and staff of the OCXC program.

3. Meetings with faculty giving OCXC personnel an opportunity to explain the program and outline ways to participate. Faculty members who teach communication-intensive (C-I) classes can share their experiences with their colleagues. An OCXC staff member can meet with faculty at their departmental meetings to discuss how they can become involved in the program.

4. A newsletter featuring recent OCXC activities, announcing upcoming events, and including testimonials of faculty participating in the program.

5. Fliers reminding faculty of the opportunity to participate in C-I courses and/or to encourage their students to use the OCXC lab.

6. Presentations by student tutors to classes describing services available in the OCXC lab. This peer relationship often encourages students to seek assistance in improving their oral

communication skills.

7. Promotion by administrators providing incentives for faculty involvement in the program. Faculty who feel that their efforts will be recognized and rewarded by their superiors are much more likely to participate in OCAC activities.

In addition to all of the above, traditional faculty and student news outlets, such as faculty newsletters and the student newspaper, provide on-going information about the program and increase program visibility.

Gearing up for OCXC

Implementing oral communication across the curriculum involves mobilizing a variety of resources. Personnel must plan, administer, and assess the program. Facilities must house the program. Instructional materials must be developed to facilitate teaching and learning. And non-speech faculty must be prepared to use oral communication activities meaningfully.

Personnel

The OCXC staff must provide administrative, support, and consulting services. The administrative staff may include a director and/or a coordinator who oversee the program. The support staff may include a secretary, graduate assistants, and undergraduate student workers. In addition to office duties student workers may assist in the OCXC lab and the peer tutoring program.

The consulting staff includes individuals engaged for specific periods of time to accomplish specific tasks. For example, faculty

members may receive reassigned time to prepare instructional materials. They may write scripts for interactive video instructional programs. Multimedia specialists may be hired to produce these programs. Speech communication faculty may volunteer their time and expertise to conduct instructional workshops, serve as instructors at faculty development retreats, and consult with non-speech faculty who teach C-I courses.

Support Facilities

To establish its own identity and to avoid interdepartmental rivalries, it may be desirable for an OCXC program to be located separate from the Speech Communication Department. This facility should include both traditional and nontraditional facilities to support its operations, such as:

1. Offices for program administrators and perhaps faculty receiving reassigned time to work with the program.

2. An office/reception area for a secretary and student assistants. This area is used to greet visitors and may also house the OCP library.

3. A classroom permanently assigned to the OCXC to be used for meetings, workshops, and receptions. This classroom may also serve as a studio for videotaping presentations and programs.

4. An OCXC Lab including a computer room used for individualized, interactive video instruction and an equipment room with studio camera, camcorders, VCRs, videotape monitors, and other electronic paraphernalia.

5. Taping/performance rooms equipped with one-way mirrors for

observation and unobtrusive videotaping.

6. A Peer Tutoring Lab staffed by graduate and senior speech majors who have studied tutoring and consulting skills. The Peer Tutoring Lab may use OCXC Lab facilities, the taping/performance rooms, and a small conference room for one-on-one consulting and coaching.

Instructional Materials for OCXC

Most student and non-speech faculty participants in OCXC are deficient in the oral communication skills needed for such activities. Even if non-speech faculty receive training in oral communication and even if speech faculty are able to provide oral communication instruction to students in C-I courses, additional instructional materials must be developed. These materials may include handouts, films, linear videotapes, textbooks, and reference books used in speech courses. However, some instructional materials must be tailored specifically to the oral communication training requirements of non-speech courses using OCXC. A central location should be established to enable students and faculty to access these materials.

Development of computerized interactive video instruction in oral communication is perhaps the most promising approach to supplementing training available in speech classes (Cronin & Cronin, 1991). Interactive video instruction provides individualized, self-paced instruction. It has proven to be as, or more, effective than conventional instruction in most academic areas. Interactive video instruction modules tailored specifically

to students in OCXC courses are being developed and tested at Radford University. Programs in coping with speech fright, interviewing content experts, and developing key ideas have been completed. Interactive video instruction modules in listening, introductions, conclusions, critical thinking, communication training in parent-teacher conferences, preparing and using a speaking outline, and small group discussion will be completed by May, 1992.

Preparing Non-Speech Faculty to Use OCXC

Non-speech faculty typically have had little, if any, training in speaking and listening instruction. Consequently, they often feel unprepared to plan, implement, and evaluate an oral communication component in their classes. Retreats, workshops, and individual conferences are three options to instruct non-speech faculty how to use oral communication activities to enhance learning.

Retreats offer a non-distracting environment conducive to sustained, intensive training. Retreat participants assess their teaching strategies, explore how an oral communication component can enhance teaching and learning, learn how to incorporate such a component in their courses, and practice their own oral communication skills.

Unlike retreats which are best held off-campus, workshops may take place on-campus. Workshop instruction is limited to specific oral communication topics, such as debating to learn, team learning, and listening.

Individual meetings between C-I faculty and their communication faculty consultants assist instructors to design, implement, and evaluate oral communication activities in their courses.

Conducting OCXC

The key element in any OCXC program is the design, implementation, and evaluation of oral communication activities in non-speech courses across the curriculum. This requires substantial time and commitment from all participants to ensure that oral communication activities are meaningful to students. This section examines the C-I course and the assessment of learning outcomes as a result of oral communication activities.

The C-I Course

Non-speech faculty teaching C-I courses must receive sufficient training in oral communication to enable them to conduct meaningful oral communication activities in their classes (see Preparing Non-Speech Faculty to use OCXC). In addition to providing such training, OCXC personnel should:

1. Require a detailed application for OCXC sponsorship of C-I courses. This application should detail the oral communication activities and describe how they would be assigned, conducted, and evaluated. Only meaningful and educationally sound applications of oral communication activities should receive OCXC sponsorship.

2. Meet with C-I instructors to help them refine their proposed oral communication activities. Non-speech faculty may need help in such applications as developing assignments, training

students in the oral communication skills necessary for the activity, conducting the oral communication activities in class, and evaluating the oral communication component of the activity.

3. Develop practical measures to ensure quality control of oral communication activities in C-I courses. This may entail conferences with C-I instructors, direct observations of class activities by OCXC personnel, review of videotapes of oral communication activities, written reports from C-I instructors, group meetings with C-I instructors to discuss outcomes of oral communication activities in their classes, and structured assessment (see Assessing OCXC Outcomes).

4. Promote the identification of C-I courses in the college catalog and/or the schedule of classes. This allows students to identify classes using the C-I approach. It also provides a mechanism for designating the C-I courses taken by students on their official transcript. This could enhance the employability of students choosing additional training in oral communication with specific applications to their major (Curtis, Winsor & Stephens, 1989).

5. Provide as much direct oral communication instruction to students in C-I courses as possible. Speech communication faculty may be willing to provide instruction to students in C-I courses or to assist students in C-I courses in preparing or rehearsing their oral communication assignments (given the permission of the C-I course instructor). Speech communication faculty may be willing to help evaluate the oral communication component of student

activities in C-I courses. Clearly such direct involvement in C-I courses entails substantial demands on speech communication faculty and must be recognized and rewarded by the university. However, this consulting approach (Cronin & Grice, 1990) is the most pedagogically sound approach to OCXC since it ensures direct instruction in oral communication for students in C-I courses from speech communication faculty.

Assessing OCXC Outcomes

Administrative agencies are demanding assessment of program outcomes. For example, the Speech Communication Association, accrediting agencies, state agencies, and many university administrators are calling for the development and application of appropriate, reliable, and valid assessment instruments. OCXC programs, to date, have relied primarily on anecdotal reports and student self-report data to assess program outcomes (Cronin & Glenn, 1990a). These measures may be of limited value in assessing learning outcomes (McCroskey, 1986; Rubin & Graham, 1988). Thus, additional assessment measures should be developed including evaluations by non-speech faculty teaching C-I courses, experimental and quasi-experimental studies of learning outcomes associated with OCXC, and quantitative reports of the number of students, faculty, and staff involved in OCXC programs.

Reliable and valid assessment of learning outcomes allows OCXC programs to refine program offerings to enhance learning across the curriculum. Furthermore, if valid empirical assessment indicates significant learning outcomes from OCXC applications, it will (a)

help convince non-participating faculty to employ oral communication activities in their courses to enhance learning, (b) help convince students and administrators of the educational value of OCXC, and (c) help secure continued and increased funding for OCXC programs.

Spreading the Pedagospel

Dissemination of OCXC Results

The benefits of well-designed, carefully implemented OCXC programs warrant national attention. All of the outlets listed below are important to spreading the OCXC pedagospel.

1. Information may be shared with colleagues through papers delivered at state, regional, national, and international speech communication conferences. In addition, non-speech faculty who have incorporated oral communication activities in their courses may present their results at their professional meetings.

2. Workshops may be conducted at colleges and universities and at meetings of speech and non-speech professional associations. An OCXC program may host a dissemination of information workshop, inviting faculty and administrators from colleges and universities interested in developing such programs.

3. Articles should be submitted by OCP faculty and C-I course instructors for publication in professional journals. Papers and informational packets may be contributed to ERIC. It is especially important that experimental and quasi-experimental studies of learning outcomes be available in the literature to those considering OCXC (see Assessing OCXC Outcomes).

4. An OCXC program should distribute periodic reports and memoranda to faculty, administrators, and granting agencies. Newsletters may be distributed to other colleges and universities and to anyone who has requested information about the program.

Outreach Activities

Outreach activities should not be confined to institutions of higher learning. Several characteristics make K-12 programs especially appropriate for OCXC: (a) younger students are generally less apprehensive about speaking in public, and so may be more receptive to this style of learning; (b) K-12 classes are usually smaller than those in higher education; and (c) K-12 teachers have often received some training in oral communication. An OCXC program should work with the teacher training program in the College of Education to ensure that OCXC is presented as a fundamental teaching/learning strategy. OCXC faculty can teach summer and evening courses for K-12 teachers and conduct in-service workshops.

Securing Additional Funding for OCXC

Regardless of initial institutional support for OCXC, a successful program will require additional support as demand grows for program services. These demands may require additional support for training, instructional materials, reassigned time or overload pay for participating faculty, program administration, space, equipment, office supplies and personnel, publicity, consultants, assessment, and travel. Although the time and effort required to seek such support must be recognized, the following sources of

support should be explored.

1. Budget initiatives
2. Public and private grants
3. Equipment donations
4. Cost sharing with other programs (e.g., Writing Across the Curriculum)
5. Joint funding ventures with government or private institutions
6. Commercial links (e.g., sales of instructional materials that are applicable to corporate training)
7. Institutional support

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